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Of Flight and Bold Men

left: the Wright machine
top right: Wilbur Wright
bottom right: Orville Wright

How It Began

The story of the United States Air Force began when the Wright brothers, Orville and Wilbur, constructed an aeroplane that actually flew. Certain far-sighted men saw the military possibilities of powered flight. On Aug. 1, 1907, an Aeronautical Division was established as part of the Army Signal Corps. About six months later the Wrights were given a contract to construct the first American military aeroplane.

left: Curtiss planes were used against Pancho Villa in 1916
right: Benjamin D. Foulois

A young lieutenant, Benjamin D. Foulois, flew with Orville Wright as a passenger on the final acceptance flight. Foulois later learned to fly using "correspondence school" instructions from the Wright brothers. Foulois' determination and devotion never diminished. He served as our Chief of Air Service overseas during World War I and retired as a Major General after serving as the Chief of the Air Corps, forerunner of today's United States Air Force.

By the summer of 1911, the Aeronautical Division had one pilot and one plane. In the same year, when the Signal Corps received $125,000 for air operations, a Lt. Henry H. "Hap" Arnold completed his flying lessons at the Wright School, Dayton, Ohio, and joined the fledgling air force. He learned his lessons well to become the Commanding General of our air forces during the second World War and led our Nation's air arm until he retired in 1946.

Two years after Arnold began his aviation career, our aviation forces had only a handful of men. In 1914, Congress authorized the establishment of an Aviation Section with 60 officers and 260 enlisted men and appropriated $250,000 to expand its aerial forces.

Foulois came to the front again in 1916 when, as a Captain, he led the First Aero Squadron into Mexico as part of the Mexican Border Expedition.

Although it was a difficult operation with training aircraft, it had beneficial effects. The Aviation Section was given slightly over $13 million to bolster its forces.

Up until this time aeronautical progress had been slow. Aviation industry was little more than a name. Then came World War I.

left: Eddie Rickenbacker, top American Ace—26 victories.
top right: Raoul Lufbery
bottom right: Frank Luke, Jr.

The First World War

American airpower rose to the occasion. Men and machines met the challenge. Our aviators made headlines with their appearance over such historic battlefields as Toul, Marne-Champagne, Chateau-Thierry and St. Mihiel. Airpower's honor roll included names like Rickenbacker, Luke, Lufbery, Springs, and Vaughn.

This "Golden Age" of individual aerial combat saw the glorification of the fighter ace.

Capt. "Eddie" Rickenbacker, America's top WW I ace, "drove a car" to his aviation career. Before the war he was active in auto racing. He went to France as General Pershing's driver and switched to aviation. He ended up commanding the 94th "Hat in the Ring" Pursuit Squadron and scored 26 air victories, destroying 22 aircraft and 4 balloons.

His dogged determination never left him and saved his life during the second World War. At that time he was a special aviation advisor to our air forces. Flying a special mission in the South Pacific, his plane was forced down and the crew spent 21 days in a small rubber life raft. The odds against rescue were overwhelming. There was the vast ocean search area, the lack of food and water and the constant danger from the near-by enemy. But Rickenbacker inspired his companions with his will to fight the odds. His determination and faith paid off when they were finally sighted and rescued. These were the same qualities that were required to fly the frail World War I aircraft against the more experienced German pilots. Rickenbacker later became the president of one of America's largest airlines.

Other old and new names found their way into the annals of this world conflict. Commanding the First Army Air Service forces was General "Billy" Mitchell, a leading aviation exponent since the time he paid for his own flying lessons while still a major stationed in Washington, D. C. Mitchell developed many of the airpower concepts and became the outstanding American air leader during the first World War.

Almost as suddenly as they began, the flames died out in Europe, and America returned to a hopeful peace.

left: Billy Mitchell
top right: Lieutenant John Macready
bottom right: Jimmy Doolittle

Between the Wars

World War I American air experience had been brief. But it was sufficient for the early air leaders to recognize the future potential of airpower. Men like Mitchell had the ideas, but not the weapons to prove their theories. They waited almost twenty years before aeronautical development caught up with their ideas.

Mitchell fought for his ideas and his ideals. In the early twenties, he proved his point about aircraft supremacy over battleships, but the test did little to help boost our airpower. One of his pilots during the test bombing of several obsolete naval ships off the coast of America—and now a familiar name—was none other than Jimmy Doolittle. He led a DH-4 observation squadron during the attack, and helped make aviation history. As time went on, the name of Doolittle came to mean, "Do more."

But the Doolittles and the Mitchells were not alone.

Some suffered, some sacrificed, and some staged the events that made airpower what it is today. On September 28, 1921, Lt. John A. Macready faced 58-degree-below-zero temperature when he flew an open-cockpit plane to the then unheard of 34,508 foot flight altitude.

left: First aircraft-to-aircraft aerial refueling . . .
with the "Question Mark" airborne almost 151 hours.
right: Seen left to right: Sergeant Roy Hooe,
Lieutenants Elwood Quesada and Harry Halverson, Captain Ira Eaker, and Major Spaatz.

Lts. Lowell H. Smith and J. R. Richter completed the first pipeline aircraft-to-aircraft aerial refueling flight in 1923. The same year, Lts. Macready and Oakly G. Kelly completed the first nonstop flight from New York to California.

Maj. Carl Spaatz, commanded the aircraft crew of "Question Mark," which included Capt. Ira C. Eaker and Lt. Elwood R. Quesada. They established a new world's record by remaining airborne for almost 151 hours. Spaatz went on to command the famous Eighth Air Force over Europe. He later led Air Force operations against Japan, and, in 1947, became the U.S. Air Force's first Chief of Staff. Eaker also commanded the Eighth Air Force. Quesada went on to command one of our ground support tactical forces in Europe.

It was not all glory and honors. Mitchell spoke too openly and sharply and was court-martialed in 1925, relieved of his duties and later resigned from the service. Ironically, in 1947, he was recognized for his far-sighted views. Congress authorized a special medal and citation as a tribute and memorial to one of America's great air leaders.

During the twenties, coast-to-coast endurance records were made and remade. The men and machines moved ahead.

In 1927 Charles A. Lindbergh, now a Brigadier General in the Air Force Reserve, made the first solo nonstop flight, New York to Paris, in the single-engine "Spirit of St. Louis."

In 1934, Arnold, then a Lt. Col., led a flight of B-10 Martin bombers from Washington to Alaska and back, paving the way for strategic bombing concepts long advocated by Andrews and Mitchell many years before. But the battle of the bomber could not be won with this one flight.

left: B-25 taking off from carrier deck while more await their turn at start of Doolittle's Raid on Tokyo

The Air Corps added to its long distance laurels in 1938 when three early model B-17 Flying Fortresses intercepted an ocean liner 725 miles from New York—and the implication became obvious. Newspaper reporters questioned the flight's stocky navigator as to "where and when will the gigantic bombers intercept the seagoing vessel?" When he predicted the time almost to the minute, and later apologized for the slight error, they were amazed. For the young pilot and navigator, Curtis E. LeMay, precision was already a way of life. He later helped forge the air route to Cairo, via the now historic Natal, Brazil route that became the "road" map for thousands of ferry command pilots during World War II. He led the B-29 Superfortresses of the famous Twentieth Air Force, using unorthodox low-level tactics against the Japanese homeland.

This was the same man who put the "deter" in deterrence when he tempered the Strategic Air Command into a double-edged blade of steel. When he retired as the U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff in 1965, it marked the end of a career that will go down in military history.

Many pioneers went on to face the terrible test of total war.

World War II

Early in the war, German Stuka dive bombers created havoc across Europe's lowlands and into France. Airpower was no longer a question mark in military planning. If there were any doubts, the Japanese quickly erased them with their infamous air attack on Pearl Harbor which brought America into the war.

In April 1942, Doolittle, wearing the silver oak leaves of a lieutenant colonel, carried the war to the Japanese homeland. He led sixteen B-25 Mitchell bombers off the deck of the aircraft carrier, Hornet, in a spectacular low-level attack against Tokyo and several other cities. His raid was a forecast of the future. He came back to the States a general, received the Medal of Honor, and then went to the European theater of operations where he headed several important commands.

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CLAIRE CHENNAULT

left: "Flying Tigers" of the 23rd Pursuit Group in Burma.
right: Major General Claire Chennault of the "Flying Tigers"

Allied bombers, fighters and transports stormed and pounded their way across Europe until the skies belonged to the Allies. Tactical airpower, led by Strother, Weyland, and Quesada, cleared the road to Berlin.

Under the leadership of such men as Doolittle, Spaatz, Eaker, Vandenberg, Twining, and LeMay, American airpower took control of the skies over Europe. The once formidable German Luftwaffe was grounded.

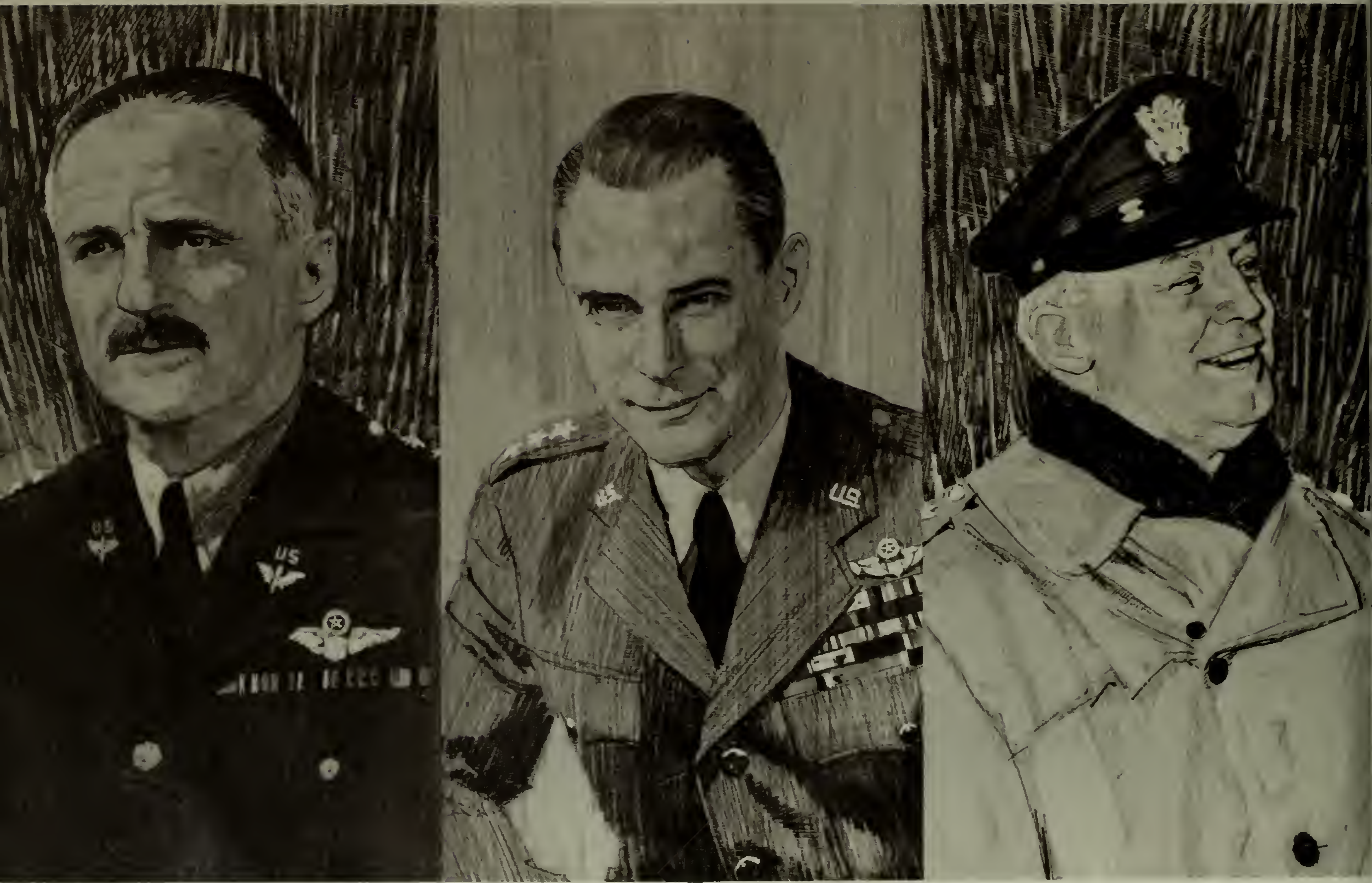
Airpower could then concentrate its strength in the Pacific. Our forces had been island-hopping. Once again they were attacking the Japanese homeland. China and Burma were starting to benefit from the airlift that extended over the hazardous Himalayas, or the "Hump" route as it was known. From the early days in the China-Burma-India theater, airpower was gaining the experience that future military airlift planning was to be based upon.

Claire Chennault, who as a captain in the early thirties predicted that fighter planes would serve many roles, was the commanding general of the famous Fourteenth Air Force in China. He proved his point time and time again against the Japanese air force. Despite overwhelming odds, every time they added up the totals, his "Flying Tigers" had the winning score.

American airpower had been smashing industrial and military targets throughout Japan. LeMay's Twentieth hammered aircraft production and oil supply centers. With Japan reeling from these attacks, American airpower delivered the knockout blow, the atomic bomb. The results are now history.

The Air Force honor roll tells the story. There was Lt. George Welch, who claimed four kills during that fateful day in December when the Japanese hit Pearl Harbor; Lt. "Buzz" Wagner, who became the first American World War II ace; Maj. Richard Bong, the Medal of Honor ace; Maj. Don S. Gentile and the many courageous pilots who became the Rickenbackers of the second world conflict and blazed aerial trails to Berlin and Tokyo.

The jet age had arrived and we needed a modern jet air arm.



left: General Carl Spaatz, Commander of the U.S. Strategic Air Forces in Europe.
middle: General Vandenberg
right: General Henry H. Arnold

After World War II

While most of the Nation's leaders advocated a rapid demilitarization, farsighted air experts following in the footsteps of men like Foulois, Mitchell, Andrews, Arnold, and other early air advocates fought against overwhelming odds to develop and produce the giant B-36 Peacemaker. History was in their favor as this 10,000-mile range bomber became the mainstay of our National policy of strategic deterrence.

Time was near when the dream of a separate Air Force would become a reality. On September 18, 1947, America's airpower started to operate as a separate military service, designated the United States Air Force. There was little fanfare, but much serious planning for the future.

With Spaatz as Chief of Staff, many Air Force commands were headed by familiar commanders—LeMay; Kenney, who led the air war in the Pacific; Stratemeyer, commander of the China-Burma-India air action; and Whitehead, who helped Kenney engineer Pacific air activities.

A year later, this new Air Force team saw its first action under its new banner, and a new role.

THE AIR TRANSPORT COMMAND

left: C-54's on ramp at Tempelhof Airport.

Berlin was cut off from the outside world. The Soviets stopped all ground traffic in and out of the city. LeMay, now commander of U.S. Air Forces in Europe, and Tunner, who developed the "Hump" supply route, started an airlift to supply Berlin's daily needs known as "Operation Vittles." During the 13-month blockade and for the four months that followed, more than 2 million tons were airlifted into the blockaded city.

left: F-86 destroys MIG over Korea

The Korean Conflict

From the moment when danger in Korea seemed imminent, airpower had to meet another challenge. The Air Force quickly rallied its forces for its initial mission—evacuate American nationals from the danger zone.

This initial action set the pace for the grueling conflict that followed. As the battle tide rolled back and forth, the Air Force once again proved the value of hitting the enemy behind the lines, tactical support for ground forces and air supply for isolated land operations.

It was also an air war. Jets edged their way into the skies and propeller-driven fighters and interceptors slipped into the past. North Korea sent Soviet built MIG-15s into the action—only to have them knocked down by U.S. F-86 Sabrejets. During this conflict, our forces maintained a 10-to-1 record over our "MIG alley" opponents.

This struggle also produced Air Force aces such as Capt. James Jabara, Capt. Joseph McConnell, Col. James Johnson and Capt. Manuel Fernandez. It produced heroes like Maj. Louis J. Sebille, who was awarded the Medal of Honor for continuing the relentless attack against Communist forces long after his plane was severely damaged.

General Stratemeyer summarized the conflict: "Nothing in the Korean War changes the basic fact that air superiority must be won before ground and sea forces can move freely in modern war."

US

left: The McDonnell F-4C

The Transition

Few professionals in the Air Force could forget the devastating destruction delivered by the German V-1 robot bombs and V-2 rockets sent across the English Channel into London during WW II. These weapons left an indelible impression on a former test pilot who flew B-17s in the Pacific during the same war.

Wearing the eagles of a colonel, Bernard A. Schriever returned to the States in 1946. This began a new career and a new Air Force era. Considered an Air Force three-letter man—pilot, scientist, engineer—Schriever guided the Air Force ballistic missile program with ideas, systems, techniques and management principles that changed most of the regulations in the book.

More important, his work with missile development led the way for the Air Force's mixed force concept—a balance of strategic bombers and missiles to deter any opposition from creating another Pearl Harbor. His leadership in the Air Force missile program also established the background for our modern space program.

Schriever's team managed the development of the Atlas, Titan, and Minuteman ICBM's. He later became a four-star general in the Air Force, and commander of the Air Force Systems Command.

It was during this period that military pilots were selected for various National space programs. Unknown at this time, except on Air Force rosters, the names Cooper, Grissom, McDivitt and White became known throughout the world.

The list of names is long and their contributions were invaluable to the Air Force effort in this new operational environment. But not all the challenges were in space.

WHITE
NASA
NASA

left: Majors White and McDivitt after 66-orbit, 1,700,000-mile flight

The Time Between Tests

Today, the U.S. Air Force has fighters that fly faster than the speed of sound, airlaunched missiles that can destroy a target that is unseen by the releasing pilot, and radar installations that can detect a missile speeding through the air at 15,000 miles per hour.

Airlift forces have been modernized with larger jet aircraft for added load capacity and faster speeds, and new strategic reconnaissance aircraft, like the SR-71, which provides an advanced photo and observation capability. Soon the Air Force will receive the new F-111 variable sweep wing, multi-purpose tactical fighter-bomber. In today's aerospace age, military strength depends largely on the skills and energy with which we conduct our current research and development efforts. The spectacular scientific gains and technological advances will play an important part in the Air Force of the future.

Trained and educated men will be the bridge that will carry the ideas and perpetuate the advancement of technology into the future. College is now a must, with added emphasis on masters' and doctors' degrees. Educated men who can grow with the increasing complexities of our modern aerospace systems are needed . . . men like Brock Strom, the former all-American guard from the United States Air Force Academy. After graduation he earned his master's degree in astronautics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Strom is now a captain in the U.S. Air Force and is stationed in Hawaii on special assignment. What does he do? For security reasons what he does can not be revealed. But you can be sure the work is for the future.

MAC

left: Lockheed C-141 Starlifter in Vietnam

Or a man like Captain Larry Reed . . . combat pilot . . . on the ground and in the air. With 800 combat missions and more than 1,200 hours in the air over Vietnam jungles, Captain Reed has received 30 Oak Leaf Clusters on his Air Medal, two Purple Hearts for wounds received in battle, one Bronze Star Medal for gallantry in action on the ground, and has been nominated for three Distinguished Flying Crosses. Shot down twice and hit by ground fire more than 50 times, his spotting aircraft provided air support for our ground forces during some of the most heated engagements against the Viet Cong. Reed also accompanied ground forces as a *forward air controller* and went on to participate in several ground actions against the enemy including one night patrol to earn his many decorations.

So you can see, to the United States Air Force, most important of all are the men . . . men who will be the pioneers for the future . . . men who look ahead without blinders, who cast aside convention, who are not afraid to make decisions, who think beyond today, and who are willing to try something different.

Among you are such men . . . the Mitchells, the Arnolds, and the LeMays of tomorrow's United States Air Force.

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Chiefs of Staff, USAF

General Carl Spaatz
1947-1948

General Hoyt S. Vandenberg
1948-1953

General Nathan F. Twining
1953-1957

Our country's future depends upon America's air power. And America's air power depends upon young men. Among you are the "Rickenbackers, Doolittles," and "LeMays" of the future. Men who look to the sky . . . and even beyond. If you're interested in information on how to work for the future of America as an officer in the United States Air Force, write to:

Registrar
United States Air Force Academy
Colorado 80840

Chiefs of Staff, USAF

General Thomas D. White
1957-1961

General Curtis E. LeMay
1961-1965

General John P. McConnell
1965-present